THE
# RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vo. II | April 3, 1936 Nisan 11, 5696 | No. 4

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## EDITORIALS

### The Problem of The United Synagogue

THE recent convention of the United Synagogue in Washington, D. C., was an event which focused attention on an unsolved problem of major importance. Anybody who judges by accounts in the papers must regard the recent convention as a display of strength. Publicity that features the convention banquet, the well-attended joint sessions of the Women's League and the United Synagogue, and the subjects outlined for discussion at the seminars leaves the impression of an organization that can summon large numbers of men and women from all over the country to listen to addresses and take part in discussions of important religious and social ideas. The truth, however, is that there was a very meager attendance of men at the convention and that, of those present, a very large portion were rabbis. But the United Synagogue was created primarily to organize the laity for service to Judaism, since the rabbinate was already organized. The number of women attending the convention showed a gratifying measure of strength on the part of the Women's League, but this can hardly be regarded as compensating for the lack of participation on the part of the men, since men constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership of the governing bodies of the congregations. In the last analysis, the United Synagogue remains today, after twenty-three years of existence not much more than a paper organization.

We say this in no spirit of malicious debunking. If we have pricked the inflated estimate of the United Synagogue's strength suggested by the publicity which emanates from it, we have done so only because we are deeply concerned that the United Synagogue shall be as strong as it seems. There is grave danger in letting people believe that all is well with the United Synagogue when all is not well. Only by an acute realization of the vital import of the function that the United Synagogue is designed to perform together with an equally acute realization of the inadequacy of its present set-up for performing that function, can we lift the United Synagogue out of its present slough. It is time that we analyze what is fundamentally responsible for the weakness of the United Synagogue and what must be done to strengthen it.

To unite all like-minded congregations in a joint project for the advancement of Jewish religion is not only important but indeed indispensable to the survival of Jewish religion. If our congregations are not to degenerate into mere social clubs who choose to worship together on the rare occasions when they choose to worship, they must pool their resources in an effort to lift Jewish personal and social life to a higher level. A tremendous amount of energy is required to raise the spiritual

level of Jewish life and it is as idle to expect separate congregations to do so as to expect separate trickles of water to turn mill wheels. A veritable Niagara is needed for this purpose and the United Synagogue should be that Niagara.

Why has it not become such? In answering the question we must guard against the mistake common to muckrakers of holding the leaders personally responsible whenever anything goes wrong with a corporate effort. The leaders of the United Synagogue have shown a zeal and devotion to their unpopular cause that merits the highest commendation rather than captious criticism. If they have not succeeded, the blame must not be put on them but must be shared by the whole constituency of the United Synagogue.

Significant of what is really wrong with the United Synagogue is the way people insist on referring to it in the plural as the "United Synagogues" rather than by its correct name, the United Synagogue. The latter name was suggested by its founder, Solomon Schechter, because he envisaged an organization which would function somewhat in the manner of the United Synagogue of England. This is a truly unitary body that exercises a complete budgetary control over all its constituent congregations. In America, to be sure, such a form of organization would be impossible. Unity among congregations would have to take on a federated form. But the relation of the congregations to the United Synagogue should nevertheless be conceived in a way that regards them as coordinate organs of a United Synagogue rather than as independent organisms that contribute to the support of the United Synagogue and utilize its services from time to time. Most of our congregations do not think of the United Synagogue except when they want its services as an employment agency for rabbis, teachers, and cantors, or when they are asked to pay their dues or to send a delegate to a convention. The United Synagogue is to them just another worthy cause which congregations are expected to support, but it is not felt by them to be *their* cause, indispensable to their functioning as a synagogue. They do not feel a loyalty toward it that transcends their devotion to their own particular congregation as a citizen's loyalty to the nation is expected to transcend his devotion to his particular state.

To achieve this sort of relationship, congregations must be prepared to make more than a financial contribution to the United Synagogue. They must be ready to surrender some measure of their administrative autonomy in order to delegate to the United Synagogue such functions as can better be performed by a union of congregations. In the field of Jewish education, for example, the United Synagogue schools of a given locality should vest all supervisory functions, the coordination of curricula and the development of adequate educational standards in a federated body that shall function as a United Synagogue branch, and these branches would similarly have to delegate functions that they cannot separately perform to the national administration of the United Synagogue. This would, of course, require that congregations contribute to the United Synagogue a much more substantial portion of their budgets than they do at present. But such contributions would be offset in great measure by the economies which unification could effect.

Whenever it is proposed to put an end to the present anarchy of competing institutions through some form of community organization, there are religious leaders both in the rabbinate and the laity who raise the bogey of secularization. But the better integration of the synagogue itself is an objective which should appeal even to them. Indeed it is a challenge to them. Are the leaders of our congregations sufficiently concerned with the problem of Jewish religion in America to be willing to surrender some measure of institutional pride and self-assertion in its interest? Their attitude to the United Synagogue,

or to whatever congregational union with which they are affiliated, is the acid test of their willingness to do so.

## The Project of An Anglo-Jewish Theater

THE Federal Theater Project of the W.P.A. is organizing a company for the production of Jewish plays in English which may be available for beneficial organizations without cost. The company will thus be able to present to the Jewish public translations of the best plays of the Yiddish theater. The first play to be produced under these auspices is Perez Hirschbein's "Idle Inn," a work of artistic distinction that promises well for the quality of drama that the public may expect from this source.

Except for a limited circle of foreign-born Jews who attend the Yiddish theater, the American Jewish public has little knowledge of the wealth of drama produced in the Yiddish language and of the depth and range of the Yiddish literature generally. While this literature, having been produced for the most part in countries where Jews live an intensely Jewish life, has the form and color of the Jewish environment, it expresses, as does all great art, universal human values. By very reason of the fact that it was written by Jews for Jews in a Jewish language, it is free from the self-consciousness which mars so much of the literature of Jews writing in English, who cannot quite shake off the tendency to apologetics or to the exploitation of local color for effect. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Jewish form of Yiddish literature enhances the universality of its meaning. The acclaim given by Gentile critics to such works as "The Dybbuk" and "Yoshe Kalb" bears testimony to the universal appeal of a Yiddish drama of the deepest Jewish dye.

What a loss it would be if, with the declining use of Yiddish as a vernacular among Jews in America and in most parts of the world, the works of our most artistic dramatists were to be inaccessible to future generations as they already are to most American Jews! We therefore hail the announcement of this project and urge Jewish organizations to take full advantage of it.

## Science and "Science" in Jewish Study

THE need for a scientific study of Jewish tradition has at last been recognized even by the Orthodox Jewry of Palestine. Within the very citadel of its strength, in Jerusalem, a Society for the Science of Judaism has been organized. The ultimate purpose of the Society is to reconcile the critical study of Jewish traditional sources with loyalty to the Torah, that loyalty to be defined in Orthodox terms. Its immediate plans include a proposed school to train *yeshibah* students in extra-Talmudic subjects. Many of these students will undoubtedly become rabbis and a training in such subjects as Jewish history, Bible, Jewish philosophy, and Jewish literature will make them more effective champions of their cause.

The group sponsoring the project includes such names as Dr. Benjamin Levine, the noted scholar in *Geonica;* Dr. M. Seidel, formerly of the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Yeshibah in New York, and Dr. H. Keller, prominent physician and Mizrahist, and a former president of the Jewish Academy of Arts and Science.

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST greets this event as a progressive development within Orthodoxy. If they should really succeed in getting large numbers of *yeshibah* students to devote themselves to extra-Talmudic studies, the initiators of this move will introduce some of the freshness and vitality and many-sidedness of Jewish tradition into a world where Jewish learning has heretofore consisted of Talmudic dialectics almost exclusively. But we cannot see much hope in the realization of the Society's ultimate purpose. There will, of course, be nothing scientific about its work, and it will most cer-

tainly not reconcile Orthodoxy with a scientific study of tradition. Scientific scholarship is a scholarship that investigates freely and comes to conclusions freely. The field and the results of its inquiry must be unlimited, impartial and unbiased.

The scholarship of the Society will be no more than a hand-maiden to religion. It will have to direct its findings so as to support the traditional version of the Jewish past. With such an assignment it will produce apologetic tracts or histories written in the style of Zeev Yavitz, which may warm the hearts of tender-minded Jews, but which can ultimately make no contribution to a scientific understanding of Jewish tradition. Loyalty to Jewish life is indeed compatible with a scientific study of the Jewish past, but only if we define Judaism as a civilization, which does not stand committed to any set of immutable dogmas.

Fortunately, Jewry has an institution in Palestine which is studying Jewish tradition scientifically—the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The University has not yet developed this branch of its work to the same extent that it has developed the departments of science; but in the course of time this vital aspect of its work will be adequately provided for. On April 1st, the Hebrew University will have completed eleven years of valuable service. We greet it on this birthday and look to it for the scientific study of the Jewish heritage which will be really scientific.

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# The Jew Faces Anti-Semitism*

## III. The Realities

*By* MILTON STEINBERG

I

IN turning to the communists' approach to the problem of anti-Semitism, we touch for the first time in our discussion upon a program which is intelligent in its analysis and sober in its advocacy of a solution. Marxists who regard economics as the primary, if not the sole, determinant of all social phenomena, naturally see it as the cause of anti-Semitism as well. They point to circumstances which have already been noted, that, in a competitive society, the very struggle for life's necessities is sufficient to create group frictions. They argue that in every decadent economy, in every order threatened with collapse because of its inner contradictions, those who seek to preserve for themselves positions of special privilege, will deliberately foment racial hatreds as a diversion of attention from basic social maladjustments. Once this diagnosis is granted, there can be only one final disposition of the Jewish problem and that is its abolition by a classless society. For if anti-Semitism is ultimately the product of an economic system, then it can be eliminated only with the destruction of its causes, with the dissolution of capitalism and the liquidation of those economic groups which play on racial antagonisms to divide the proletariat.

Despite the fact that the Marxist envisages this issue clearly, it is by no means certain that he has an absolute solution. In the first place, it is questionable whether his diagnosis is at all complete. It does not reckon with other causes of anti-Jewish prejudice such as the religious tradition, and psychological resentment of what is strange. The open-minded communist recognizes the reality of these causes. As a communist, however, he insists that they are ultimately derived from the economic. But the mere assertion that economics explains everything does not

*This is the last of a series of three articles.

necessarily make that statement a fact. The communist may insist that in striking at the economic order he is striking at the sole root of the evil of prejudice. It is, however, more likely that while he is addressing himself to a cause which is indisputably potent, he is neglecting other independent causes, perhaps of equal potency. It is not inconceivable that a vigorous anti-Semitism can grow from psychological and cultural roots, even after the economic cause has been destroyed.

Communist Russia is today a laboratory in this regard as it is in so many others. It has made the expression of prejudice against Jews a crime against the state. Certainly it has succeeded in suppressing anti-Semitism. For its efforts, it deserves the praise of all men of good will. But it is perfectly conceivable that anti-Semitism may have been forced to cover in Russia by coercion, without having been destroyed. All this may sound a bit ungracious and ungraceful, an unfair, carping criticism in the face of a heroic attempt. And yet, there are grounds for objective and dispassionate scepticism as to the ultimate success of the Russian effort to extirpate anti-Semitism. For communism in Russia, even if it should succeed in its economic program, will not have eliminated human competition. It will merely have changed its objectives. Men who need no longer struggle against each other for food will still compete for power and fame. If a Gentile can resent Jews because they have acquired physical goods which he desires, he can resent them equally because they have won recognition and positions of influence over him. It is not beyond imagination that communists may be anti-Semities, just as it is conceivable that a communist regime, faced with threatened revolution might exploit group prejudice to preserve itself.

The objection that anti-Semitism is incompatible with the Marxist ideology is unfortunately no adequate response. Anti-Semitism is definitely undemocratic. And yet it has flourished in democracies. If then the Russian government merits the world's approbation for its courage, consistence and benevolence in dealing with anti-Semitism, it must be understood that the crisis has not yet been reached. At present communism is a new, burning vision. Its adherents possess all the fresh idealism and enthusiasm of new converts to some cause, as was the case with democratic movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The test will come when communism in Russia has passed from the missionary stage into the humdrum conditions of workaday life. Only then will it be possible to know whether it has escaped the fate which has overtaken other social idealisms.

Whatever its theoretical strength or weakness as a solvent of the problem of anti-Semitism, communism is totally impossible as a program for American Jewry. It involves the grotesque proposition that Jews become communists in order to destroy prejudice against themselves. But most Jews, the overwhelming proportion of them, are neither members of the party nor sympathizers with it. This is asserted neither in praise nor blame of American Jews. It is stated for what it is—a fact. Jews are not communists because they are conservatives or liberals either by conviction or interest; because, perhaps, they are unable to accept the Marxist ideology; because, in some cases, they are well satisfied with the status quo; because, if they are reformers, they may prefer evolution within the framework of democracy to revolution against it; because, in ever so many cases, they are not interested in politics or economics; because they know nothing about communism or are strongly prejudiced against it. In brief, they are not communists for the same reasons for which Gentiles are not. It would be scarcely realistic to approach these large bodies of Jews who are indifferent or hostile to Marxism and tell them that they should embrace it on the remote chance of being able thereby to eliminate anti-Semitism. Indeed, it is highly probable that many, if not most

Jews, prefer capitalism with anti-Semitism to communism without it.

It would be unnatural if some Jews were not affected by the communist promise of a liquidated anti-Semitism and moved by the splendid exhibition of Soviet Russia. Unquestionably, Jews have been won to communism on that score alone, just as negroes have been converted by the Marxist attitude toward color lines. But when the enthusiastic communist propagandizer urges Jews to adopt his position to save themselves from anti-Semitism he is talking pure moonshine. So far as one can see into the future, there will be no revolution to the left in the United States. A mass conversion of American Jews to communism, inconceivable as it is, would at present serve only to accentuate anti-Semitism in this land in exactly the same fashion in which a Gentile communism would serve largely to drive conservatives into reaction, and reactionaries into fascism. This statement is not intended as an argument to keep a Jew who believes in communism from embracing it. That is his human right and prerogative. If this article has made any point at all so far, it is that Jews must live freely and naturally, without constant hesitation over Gentile opinion. But it is fantastic to offer to Jews a communist revolution as a method of self-protection against the peril of the moment and of the determinable future, when, in effect, it is just the opposite.

The communist position, however, possesses the genuine virtue of dealing with one of the actual factors in the creation of anti-Semitism. And, if its program as a whole is unacceptable, it does point to the economic front as one on which Jews should work. In addition to any purely impersonal and ideal motives, Jews have a special reason to be concerned about the correction of the inequities and hardships of our social order. From this quarter they are threatened continuously. They owe it to themselves as Jews, as well as to mankind and its ideals, to do what they can to mitigate the ferocities of competition in an individualistic eonomy. As a policy of long range self-defense, they should support those movements which seek to give all men an adequate livelihood and to protect them against exploitation. Similarly they must resist to the full the powers of economic and political reaction, the chauvinism and fascism which threaten the western world. As human beings and as Americans they ought to throw their lot in with those groups which struggle for a fuller life for all. This obligation devolves morally on all men alike. For Jews it is a practical and inescapable necessity.

## II

But even among those who accept the economic order as it is, there are recognitions that anti-Semitism is fed by a special economic factor. Thus, it is widely asserted in the most conservative Jewish circles that prejudice against the Jew is largely the result of the extreme concentration of Jews in certain areas within the middle class. These analysts point to the fact that almost all Jews are bourgeoisie, that through the force of historic circumstance they have become confined to the areas of the professions and of mercantile occupations. They argue that no small part of anti-Semitism springs from the fact that Jews are too densely concentrated in too limited an economic sphere. They suggest that a deliberate attempt be made to disperse Jewish economic activity in the direction of agriculture and the handicrafts. The fact is, of course, inescapable. Most Jews are either middle men or professionals. The inference from the fact is not so certain. It is by no means clear that this concentration is especially responsible for anti-Semitism. Nor is it especially apparent that anti-Semitism might not exist in rural areas were a million of the American Jews to go to the soil.

Aside from its intellectual uncertainties, this program of economic dispersion faces overwhelming practical difficulties even if it be granted that such a diffu-

sion would benefit the Jewish group. It is difficult to see who would serve as volunteers to effect this deconcentration. What the whole issue boils down to is this—that middle class Jews recommend that other Jews become farmers and artisans without being ready to become such themselves. Furthermore, with agriculture suffering from overproduction and with an oversupply of every form of technical skill, it is difficult to see how the Jew could successfully make his way into these economically distressed fields.

The very character of the Jewish mind makes the effort an abnormally difficult one. The Jew for centuries has possessed prejudices in favor of professional and mercantile occupations. For long periods of time he has been urbanized to an unusual extent. To dispel these prejudices, to ruralize his personality would involve a psychological revolution, one which might be effective in Palestine or Russia under the tremendous drive of necessity and social idealism together, but one which seems overwhelmingly difficult here in America. A more even occupational distribution of Jews in America is obviously desirable. But if it is a consummation to be hoped for, it is such more because of the health of the Jewish group than because either reasonably or practically it offers a solution to the problem of anti-Semitism.

## III

There is another front on which something is being done to combat anti-Semitism and on which much more ought to be attempted—and that is in the field of education. Prejudice against Jews, as we have seen, is not a matter of economics alone. It is a product also of a social heritage, a living survival of old religious antagonisms, medieval economic conflicts, and the misunderstandings of the past. These have been translated into the present by the home, by literature and by the church. They take the form of a bias against Jews, which is invigorated constantly by the economic struggles and the psychological discomforts of the present. Some Gentiles therefore are conditioned against Jews in their earliest youth, others acquire a hostility derived from personal experience. All Gentiles are potential victims of anti-Semitic propaganda.

Against this heritage of hate and the contemporary influences which intensify it, education and counter-propaganda are logical instruments. If Jews and Gentiles can be brought into intellectual contact with each other, if their respective heritages and problems can be discussed, if their prejudices can be examined frankly and evaluated in the cold light of reason, something can be accomplished toward establishing a more sympathetic rapport between the two groups. Such efforts are now being made by organizations such as *The National Conference for Better Understanding between Jews and Christians.* It has become fashionable in some circles, both Jewish and Christian, to disparage such "good-will" work. But unless one is ready to concede the total inefficacy of all education in molding character, one cannot regard such efforts as unimportant.

To be sure, the difficulties which face such educational attempts are most imposing. The attitudes to be changed are deeply ingrained and of great antiquity. Large areas of the population must be reached, not merely in the course of an occasional sporadic meeting, but over long periods of time. To be effective, this program calls for sustained intellectual and emotional pressure. But all this means merely that the work must be carried on on a larger scale than has been possible in the past. Nor must too much be expected from such efforts. Next to nothing then can be accomplished by education in the person who has been conditioned all his life against Jews. But there are those Gentiles whose prejudices are not deep-seated and who can be favorably affected. There are very many non-Jews who have no special feelings about Jews at all but who, exposed to anti-Jewish propaganda and interested by what has happened in Germany, have begun to ask

themselves what it is all about and to inquire whether there may not be something in anti-Semitism after all. Unless the disease is chronic, it may still be cured. It may be possible through education to immunize the general population against it so successfully that a threatened epidemic may be averted.

## IV

There is one additional line of conduct open to the Jew, that of an active resistance to the powers of anti-Semitism. Such, for example, is the purpose of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai Brith. It is obviously the part of wisdom for the Jew not to permit slanderous descriptions of himself to circulate freely. If the objectionable statements about Jews are unintentional misrepresentations, efforts should be made to correct the misapprehensions of their authors. If they are vicious libels, recourse should be taken to the law. Nor should Jews hesitate to use their legal rights, their influence and the pressure of their numbers to prevent encroachment on the liberties which they enjoy. Such a procedure is a nonviolent resistance against those powers which have virtually destroyed German Jewry and which seek through propaganda to undermine the security of Jews throughout the world. It is also a dignified and human strategy. Self-respecting human beings do not accept blows without at least raising an arm to ward them off.

But when the whole case has been heard, there is pathetically little which American Jews can do to mitigate such anti-Semitic feelings as exist and prevent their aggravation. Inconspicuousness, impeccable manners and camouflage are, as we have seen, neither practical nor conducive to a healthy self-respect; to seek Jewish salvation through communism is unrealistic, ineffective and impossible for the vast majority of Jews. There remain only the patient effort to correct those social evils from which anti-Semitism flows, the laborious attempt at education and propaganda, and such measures in self-defense as are available to a small minority through the law and the exertion of group pressure. All these available procedures suffer from certain sharp limitations. None offers a quick, direct and unified approach to the difficulty. They call rather for long range efforts, which, even at best, can attain appreciable results only in the remote future, and which as a result demand a measure of patience difficult to muster in a crisis. They are of doubtful efficacy. A rising tide of anti-Semitism would brush aside the most concerted resistance Jewry could offer, would wash away in a flood of passion such understanding as might be developed, and by its very character, would make impossible a satisfactory readjustment of the social order. And in none of those programs, can the Jew proceed alone and by himself. Each demands a high measure of Gentile cooperation, something of which the Jew, with his present sense of insecurity, is by no means sure. Jews by themselves cannot remold the world's economy. They cannot use reason with Gentiles unless the latter are open to it. They may resort to self-defense through the law only so long as the predominating Gentile opinion is willing to allow them to use such instruments. In sum, the only intelligent methods of operation are painfully slow when a quick decisive procedure is desired, of doubtful efficacy, and dependent on the uncertain help of the Gentile world.

The position of the Jew reduces itself to this. The only acceptable procedures, those of economic reform, education and resistance through the law, are, even at best, insufficient.

The fact of the matter is that Jews, through their own efforts cannot prevent the further rise of anti-Semitism. Like the stars, they may incline, but they are unable to compel. What Jewry does or leaves undone will doubtless affect the future position of Jews; it will not ultimately determine it. Anti-Semitism in the modern world is a matter of vast economic, social and psychological powers,

which flow on, slightly diverted perhaps but not seriously checked by Jewish efforts. The Jew then faces a destiny which he did not make, which springs from factors beyond his control and which he cannot influence except in the slightest degree. He is not altogether impotent, but he is very close to it. This is a bitter truth for Jews to swallow, this statement of their powerlessness. It may sound like defeatism. We insist that it is only sober realism.

## V

Is the Jew, then, in a position of tragic impotence? Is there nothing which he can do in order to live better in a hostile world? There is one respect in which he is not hopelessly resourceless, in which as a matter of fact he possesses a completely free and independent hand. He cannot, as we have already seen, seriously change the world external. But he can do what he chooses within himself. Here is an area over which he has absolute control—the realm of his attitudes and his ideas. This is at all times a domain of immense significance. It is such especially when the world without becomes too much for men.

Centuries ago, Socrates defined the function of philosophy as that of a *peisithanatos,* a persuader of death. For there are in the career of men certain inevitable evils, frustration, pain, and death, which are not of man's making or choice and over which ultimately he has little or no control. It is the part of wisdom, in the face of these ineluctable disasters, to prepare one's self to endure them as best one may. He who must die, who cannot escape that fate, must, according to the ancient sage, develop an attitude of mind which will enable him to endure the evil. Such has been the counsel of all the sages of all ages. Strong and wise men have, whenever they were faced with inevitability, looked to their own souls and sought to develop an attitude of mind which would enable them to reconcile themselves to the uncontrollable.

In a very real sense, this advice applies exactly to the Jews. Their disaster is a bitter actuality in some lands, a real possibility in all others. The world's hostility, despite all efforts which they can and should make, is for them uncontrollable. Like death for the individual, anti-Semitism for the Jew is something which he did not make, and which he cannot much mitigate or eliminate. He must then reorganize his inner life as to live most fully, joyously and creatively in the constant presence of the evil.

Briefly stated, this means that *he must make his Jewishness as richly significant to himself as he can.* For it is that for which he is being penalized. Only if being a Jew has abundant meaning can it compensate him for the hardships which attend it. Moreover, the Jew, as we have seen, faces a grave psychic peril. Subjected to anti-Semitic propaganda, denied freedom because he is a Jew, he may be led to resent himself, his fellows and Judaism generally, all because they are the sources of his discomfort. Then his case is tragic indeed. For he will detest what he is without being able to escape from it. The only inner attitude which can enable the Jew to endure his destiny and which can preserve his self-respect, is a full, creative Jewishness.

If this suggestion for Jewish attitudes seems unrealistic, it will become the more understandable if we consider the reaction to anti-Semitism of two Jews, one of whom possesses a full appreciation of Jewishness and the other of whom does not. Both alike will experience the same exclusions, denials and insults, both will be distressed with the same anxieties for the future. To the Jew to whom Judaism is meaningless, a mere accident of birth, the trials involved in being a Jew have no compensating circumstances. He suffers without reward and without reason. Only that Jew to whom Judaism has significance can find point and purpose in his lot. If he is penalized, he is also compensated. If he suffers, he is suffering for something precious, the preservation of his

group and its culture. In discomfort, he has solace; under persecution, a reason for outliving the persecutor. That very Jewishness which is the innocent cause of his unhappy condition, is also the source of great happiness. Only with such an attitude, can the Jew find his identity more than an unmitigated misfortune.

That Judaism is the Jew's last defense against anti-Semitism, and the only one which lies entirely within his control has been widely recognized of late. Some Jews have always entertained that opinion, others have adopted it recently as a result of an examination of the world scene, still others have had it thrust upon them. But the consciousness that the Jew requires his Jewishness in order to transcend anti-Semitism is profounder today and more generally experienced than ever before.

But it is not enough to recognize the validity of a conclusion. Logical inferences must be drawn from it. For if Judaism is to be meaningful to Jews, if it is to endow them with a sense of significance and worth, it must be a Judaism which is acceptable to the intellect and which translates itself into specific acts. Otherwise, the assertion of Jewishness remains an empty gesture repeated mechanically until all vitality flees from it. This means specifically that the Jew who recognizes his need of Judaism has a long road to travel from that point of recognition until his Jewishness actually satisfies his need.

## VI

The individual Jews and Jewry collectively must undertake certain specific tasks. In the first place, they must evolve an adequate philosophy of Jewish life in the light of which they may find it possible simultaneously to retain an ancient heritage, and the thought of the modern world. The old ideology of the medieval Jew is gone forever. It is no longer possible for Jews to tell themselves that they are members of an especially chosen people and that their modes of living are directly sanctioned by God's will. Another theory of Jewish life is required, one which shall define the character of Judaism, which shall reinterpret traditional Jewish theology, ethical and ritual concepts, and from which shall flow canons by which activity may be determined. In addition to a new and more adequate rationale for Jewish life, Jewry faces the problem of re-educating itself in the Jewish past. It must evolve a satisfactory system of ritual acts and observances, it must build an adequate communal structure for its group life, it must hasten the establishment in Palestine of a Jewry which, by the very fact that Judaism is its primary culture, shall create new Jewish values, mores and artifacts for Jewish communities throughout the world.

These challenging tasks are individually and collectively difficult ones, but they are unavoidable. Failing in their successful accomplishment, the Jew who turns to his Judaism to answer his need will find his Jewish life unreasonable for want of a rationale, uninspired for lack of knowledge, empty for the absence of forms, confusing because of its chaotic character, and anemic for want of novel creations. In brief, without this preliminary process Judaism will fail the Jew. It will give him neither significance nor a sense of worth.

But if the task be difficult, the rewards are great. The Jew who has come to understand and love his tradition, derives many satisfactions from it. The past opens to him a religious faith and an ethical idealism, a vast treasure house of literature, history, music and art, toward all of which he can possess an attitude of reasoned acceptance derived from his philosophy of Jewish life. He will have the companionship of his fellows, a comity made all the more welcome because of the uncordiality of others. He will find outlets for his energies in Jewish group life. The very problems of Jewish living, whether ideological, theological or communal, present a challenge to his creative efforts. His personal existence can be

made colorful by the poetic rites, customs and observances of an ancient civilization. And through it all, his life takes on meaning. He regards himself no longer as the unfortunate victim of a malicious fate, penalized and ostracized for no reason. He is now one of a group which has created a culture and which seeks to preserve it, for his own enrichment and mankind's.

The last answer of the Jew to anti-Semitism is not less Judaism but more. Only through a full Jewishness, can he find satisfaction in his identity. Only so can he be imbued with a wholesome respect for self at a time when dark powers work to rob him of his self-esteem. For observe, that this program of a cultural renaissance covers all contingencies. If anti-Semitism in America become a raging tempest, the Jew is prepared in spirit to face it. Like his ancestors, who outlived the wildest gales, he finds his Jewishness worth the cost, his own self-respect unshaken. And if the storm does not break, if the clouds on the horizon turn out to be, as may well be the case, false omens, then, too, much has been gained. The Jew, as an individual, has made his own life the fuller by participation in the Jewish tradition and as a result has the greater cultural contribution to offer to mankind. Only Judaism is the Jew's insurance in spirit against the hazards of hostility.

This program then, is no *peisithanatos,* no attempt to coax Jews to die gracefully. It is rather, if we may coin a Greek phrase, a*peisibios*—a persuasion to Jews to live, to be what they are fully, creatively and unapologetically, to adopt the only course which will enable them through their own efforts to conduct their lives with usefulness, dignity and self-respect.

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# The New Jewish Religious Music

*By* JUDITH K. EISENSTEIN*

I

ON April first there will have been a performance in Town Hall, New York City, of a Sabbath Eve Service composed by Jacob Weinberg, one of the small group of musicians who are devoting their talents to the development of Jewish music. People who concern themselves with Jewish expression in any form, and with Jewish religious expression in particular, will undoubtedly be greatly interested in this performance. Also a large number of people, having heard the great religious music of the outside world, the work of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and accustomed to hearing it in the concert hall, will be curious to hear what the Jewish world has to offer.

It is impossible to predict what exactly will be the impression left by the Service at this, its first performance. The actual effect of blended voices and instruments is never to be measured by one's imagined hearing of it through examination of a score. However, the published score** does reveal sufficient evidence of worth and beauty to warrant its discussion at this time. In its published form, the service is arranged for baritone (cantor), mixed chorus, and organ. The carefully worked out organ part testifies to the composer's intention of his work for synagogue use, rather than for concert performance, where he substitutes a string orchestra. The order of the Service is based on the Reformist ritual, as it is found in the Union Prayer Book. The prayers are ar-

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**Jacob Weinberg. Sabbath Eve Service. (Servizio Pentatonico). Bloch Publishing Co., New York. 1935.

ranged variously, for chorus, for baritone solo and chorus, for solo exclusively, and for chorus a capella. In addition, there are two soli for the organ—a silent devotion, and an accompaniment to the recited Kaddish. The closing hymn, Adon Olam, is given in two versions—one for the whole ensemble, and one, simplified for congregational singing.

The Service is conceived as a dramatic whole. It rises gradually, through a series of contrasting moods, to a stirring climax close to the end, when the chorus sings, "On that day the Lord shall be one and His Name shall be One"; falls to the subdued Kaddish, and ends with vigor in the metrical rhythms of Adon Olam. It is held together in fine unity by the musical material. First of all, there is the prevalence of the pentatonic scale—and secondly, there is the recurrence of thematic material throughout various portions of the Service. The writing is skillful, replete with contrapuntal intricacies, giving each voice independent value. The organ part is never a mere accompaniment. The melodic line is never banal, and is frequently quite stirring.

It is possible, nevertheless, that the Jew who is well acquainted with traditional synagogue services will be startled by the unfamiliar effects that are produced. They will seem strange, stark, almost barbaric, utterly different from the plaintive cadences of the home-town cantor who stands before his congregation and improvises on mellow themes; completely unrelated to the warm old songs that his congregation sings in unison, with great fervor. The conclusion he might hastily arrive at is that this service is not "Jewish." However, one must bear in mind, first of all, that the introduction of modern harmonies, though they be completely accepted by this time in secular music, is still very new in a religious setting. Secondly, one must remember that the composer has endeavored to hark back to a more ancient past than the European ghetto, in his search for modal and thematic material. Thirdly, one ought to examine the texts very closely, and discover whether their meaning is not more truly brought out by those very stark and barbaric sounds. Vigorous joyousness, stern admonitions, and tragic solemnity are the essential characteristics of the oldest parts of our liturgy, rather than sweetness, or pathos, or sentimentality. And perhaps these qualities have been forgotten and neglected, in our more immediate past, to be revived in such interpretations as this one.

## II

The Weinberg service, however, has a greater importance at this moment, than its own intrinsic merit. It is bound to raise a large number of questions, and should be effective in arousing the Jewish public to the need for new thought and experiment in Synagogue music. It is a strange phenomenon that in the world's literature of music, among the greatest compositions are religious expressions. The Bach *B Minor Mass,* Handel's *Messiah,* Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis,* Brahm's *German Requiem,* are surely some of the most glorious music ever written. And, on the other hand, the Jewish civilization, whose crowning achievement is its religion, whose very folk song until recently was almost exclusively religious, offers nothing which can approximate these in esthetic development and maturity. We started from the same point, nay, we antedated the Christian Church with a profusion of melodic material, Biblical chants, prayer chants, metrical hymns. The Church, beginning with its plain song reading of the Gospel by a priest on special occasions, dramatized and beautified this reading until it became Cantata, Passion, Oratorio. Beginning with its unison chanting of the *Kyrie,* the *Credo,* the *Sanctus,* it evolved the tremendous Mass. Jewish religious music, until modern times, continued to consist in melodic chant, changing slightly in mode and rhythm, to be sure, developing new and noble melodies for outstanding prayers such as the Prayer for Rain, the *Olenu* of *Yom Kippur,* the

*Kol Nidre*. But there was no gradual growth and elaboration of musical forms. The whole world of polyphonic music never touched us.

This has been due partly to Jewish isolation from the rest of the world and partly to the traditional prohibitions of instrumental music. Be that as it may, we are confronted with the sad fact that the Jews did not become ready to take a new step in developing their music until the Emancipation, when they first came into forcible contact with the wealth of European culture. Here, on the one hand, they were so overwhelmed by that culture, so obsessed by eagerness to take it over, that they were able, as in the case of Sulzer, Lewandowski, and others, merely to imitate it slavishly. On the other hand, they were faced for the first time with a serious challenge to that very religion which had been the inspiration to whatever music the Jews did have. The simple piety, the sublime faith which had moved a Bach or a Haydn could not truly function in a sophisticated, "en-

## FREEDOM AS A SPIRITUAL IDEAL

Since the destruction of the Temple, the Jews never wearied of the manifold reiteration of the Exodus theme in prayer and through religious rites. Twice daily in the prayers and after each meal in the thanksgiving benediction, the Jew would thank God for having delivered his ancestors from Egypt. And when Passover came, he recounted to his children the story of the redemption. The main motive which kept alive the memory of the Exodus during the last two thousand years was undoubtedly the hope that, as God had wrought miracles for His people in the past, had been gracious to them and had delivered them from bondage, so would He, when the time came, once again manifest His power on behalf of His people, restore them to their land and liberate them from all the forms of oppression to which they were subject.

But changes have taken place which render that simple version of the Exodus and its meaning no longer adequate for our spiritual needs. Jews are still the victims of oppression; but they have entered into such intimate relationship with the life of the world about them that they can no longer envisage their own deliverance except as a phase of general human deliverance. If miracles are to be enacted as part of the future redemption, they cannot be conceived as similar to those which tradition associated with the Exodus. They cannot consist in the penalization of other nations with plagues from which Israel is to be exempted, and through which it is to be released from bondage. The new miracles to which we look forward must rather involve the redemption of society in general from present ills, and mark such a transformation of human nature and social institutions through the God-given power of intelligence and self-mastery that they will far outshine in splendor the fabled miracles of Egypt. . . .

This ideal of freedom assumes that, potentially, human beings and human groups have something unique to contribute to the totality of life. That ideal further assumes that God, as Redeemer, is the Power that makes for the discovery and realization of that potential uniqueness in individuals and groups. This conception of freedom is ethical and religious. It is ethical, because it directs attention to the ethical potentialities in persons and communites, which are in need of being recognized and stimulated. It is religious because it helps us get a deeper understanding of God as He manifests Himself in human experience. It is this concept of freedom that gives worth and sanctity to human life. The teaching of R. Johanan b. Zakkai (Kiddushin 22b) to the effect that God can be served only by free moral agents, and not by slaves, points to the truth that **the meaning of religion can be grasped only when social life is based on freedom.**

—MORDECAI M. KAPLAN—

lightened," Jewish musician. Indeed, it has been unable to move any but a very small number of non-Jewish composers. In general, composition of religious music has been on the down-grade to a great extent, since old religious values have been shaken, and no new ones have taken their place.

What impulse, then, shall urge the Jewish composer to write a Friday evening service or a Yom Kippur service, or any other type of Jewish religious music? We will disregard for the time the musician who is willing to turn out "services" to order, as long as there are still synagogues or temples to pay for them. The sincere Jewish musician, if he writes Jewish music at all, is most likely to be impelled by national self-consciousness. He may have been part of a group of nationalist composers, as Weinberg was one of the Russian Jewish school at the turn of the century. He may have been shocked into national self-awareness by outside circumstances, as was Ernest Bloch. But his first attempts at Jewish self-realization in musical composition are almost always secular in character. Serious Jewish composers made settings for Yiddish and Hebrew poetry in song. They wrote Hasidic suites, dance suites, variations on Palestinian folk themes. And in almost every case they discovered that for really rich sources in Jewish music they must look beyond the folk song of Eastern Europe and modern Palestine, to the older, more unique and more exploitable religious themes—the ancient Bible and prayer modes. At first they tried to use this newly discovered source of musical material, for secular purposes. And we get such phenomena as a "Children's Suite" by Achron, based on the cantillation of the Pentateuch. These attempts inevitably become a little silly. The composer is forced by logic to turn to religion itself as the theme for composition. But he arrives there by musical logic, by his sincere conclusions as a musician, and not necessarily by his religious conclusions as a thinking person.

Now, willing—even eager—to take up the composition of religious music, the Jewish musician finds all sorts of conflicts, both within and without himself. He cannot approach his task with straightforward spontaneity. He must decide whether to write for the Orthodox synagogue without an organ, or the Reformist synagogue with an organ, whether to allow for congregational singing or not to, whether to use Hebrew texts or English texts, whether the texts mean anything to him at all, or can even be uttered without conscientious objections. Jewish music, then, stands still again. The general chaos in Jewish life, which is reflected in Jewish thought, makes itself felt in Jewish artistic expression. Here once more we are forced to realize that until conditions of Jewish life are so arranged as to allow for healthy progress into new religious thought and new forms of expression for it, Jewish music, along with all the forms of art, cannot possibly flourish.

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